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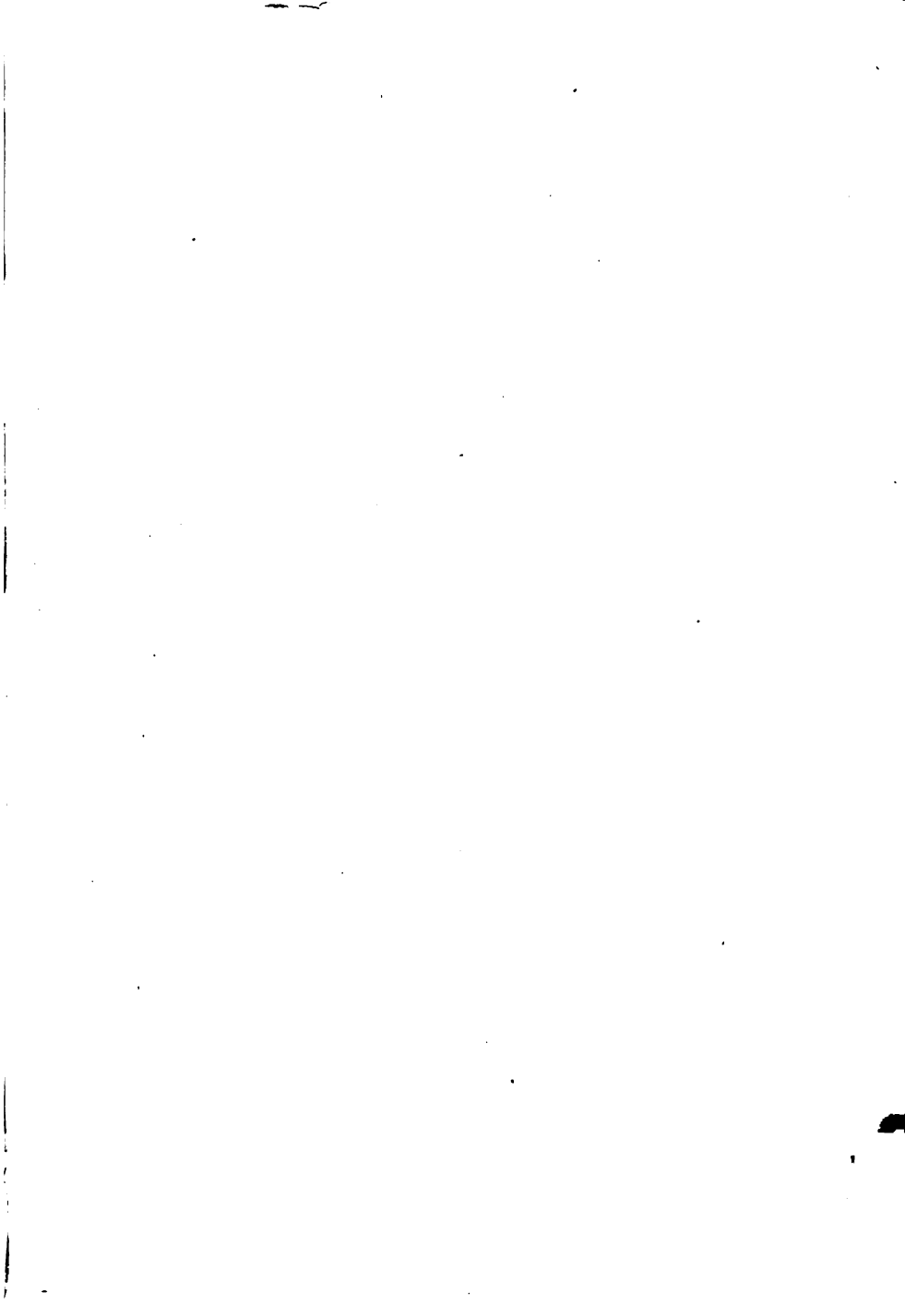
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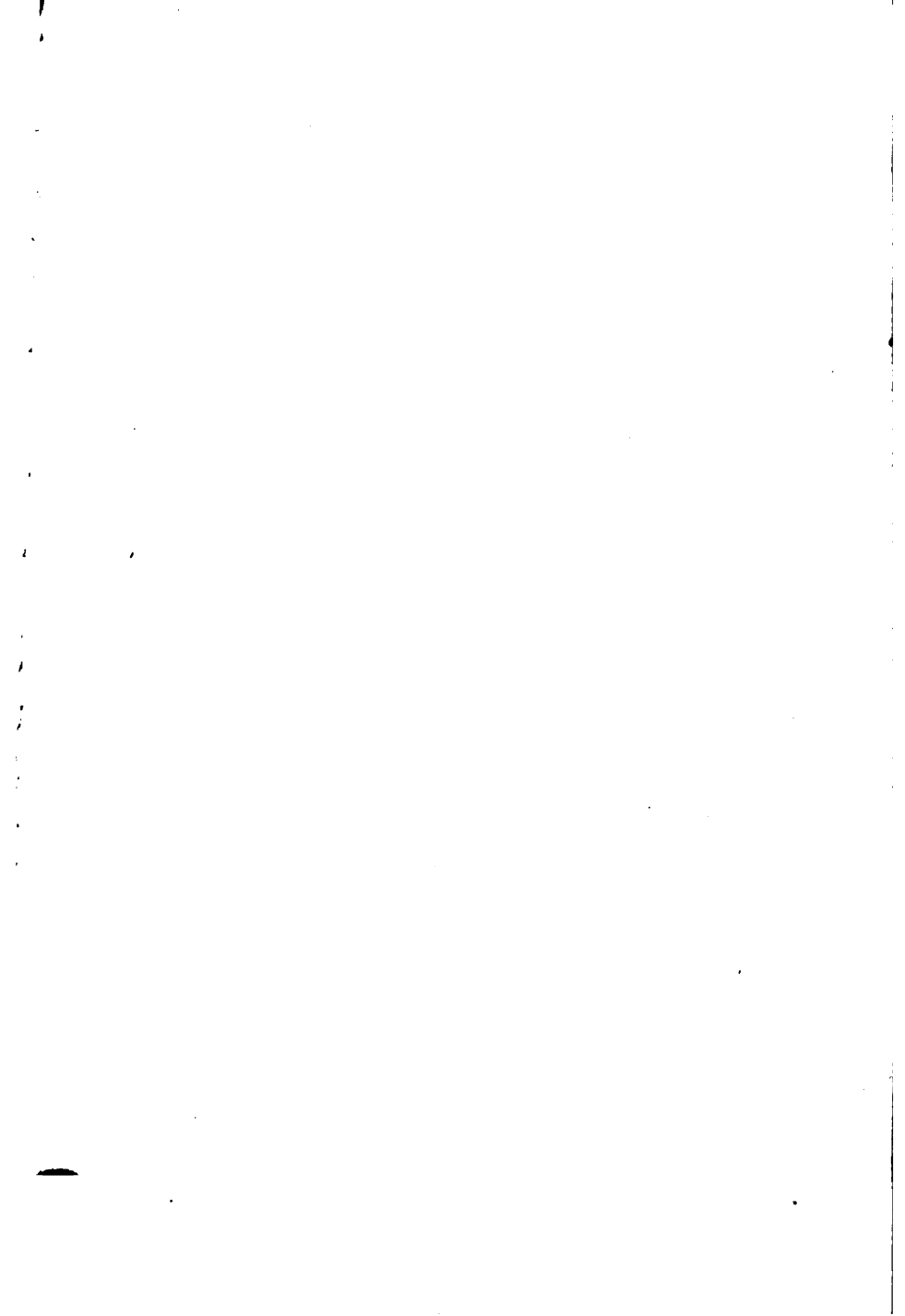
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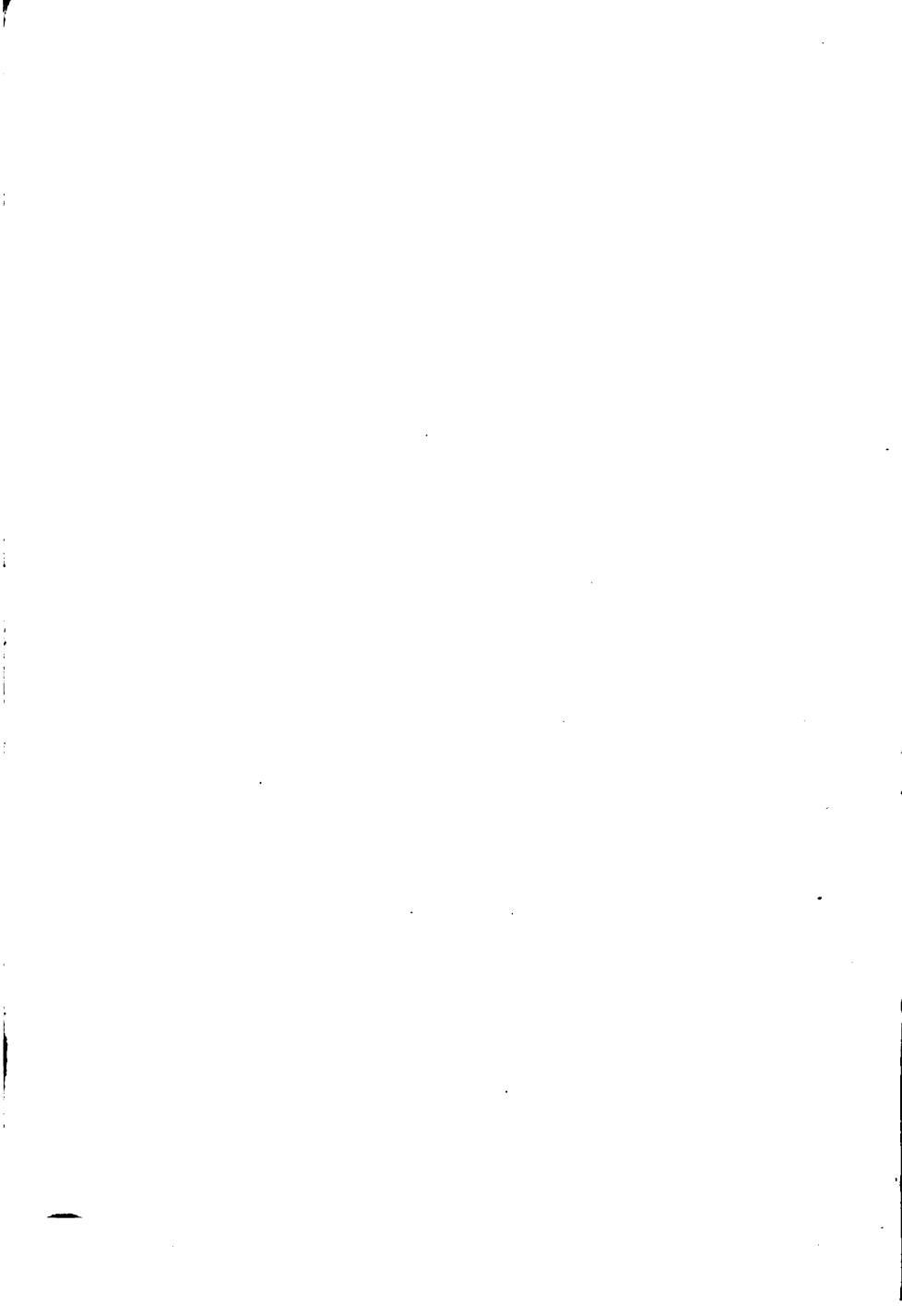
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**THE GREEN HELMET AND
OTHER POEMS**



THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER POEMS

BY

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

DEPT. OF
CULTURE

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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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1912

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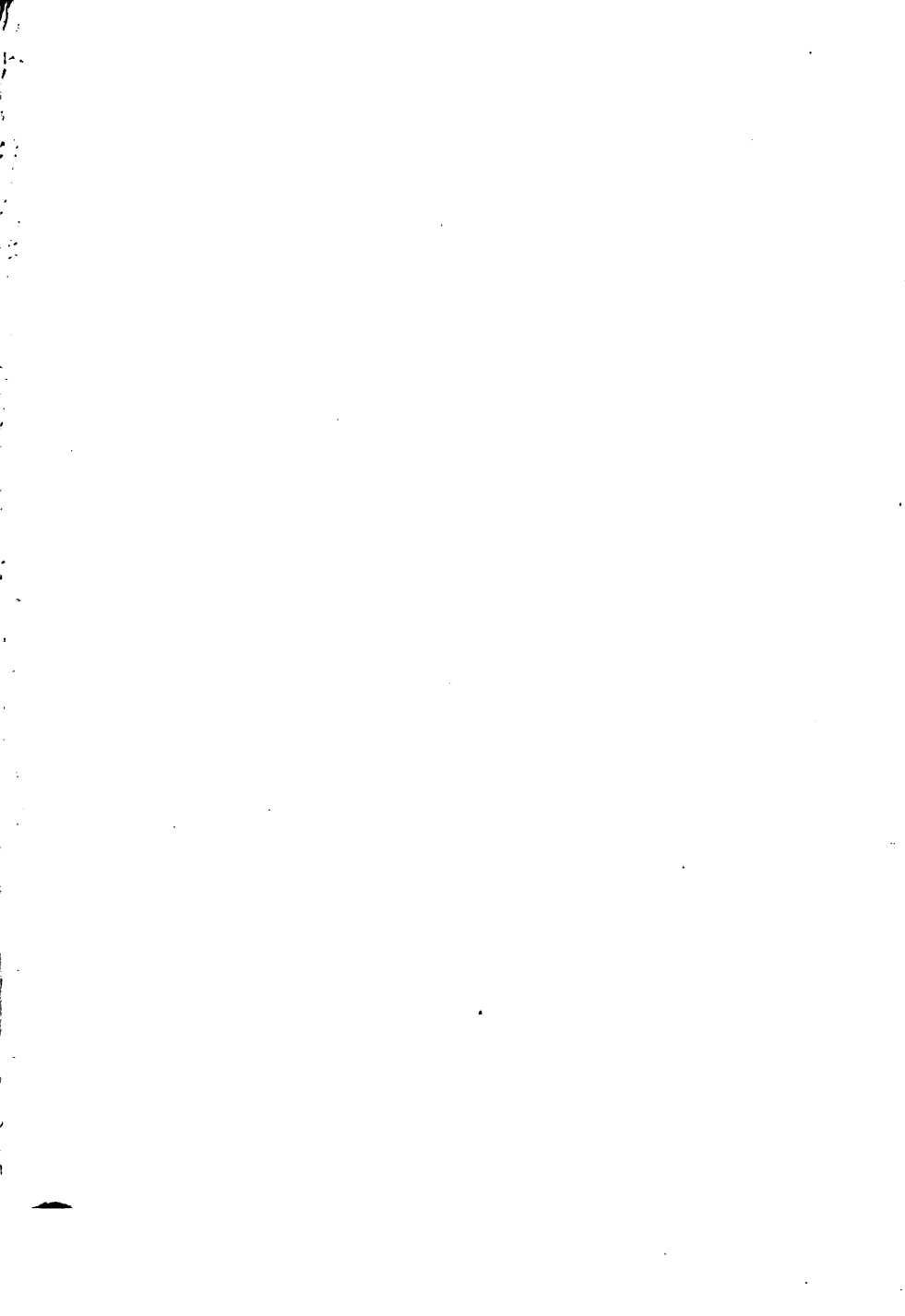
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TO THE
APPROVED

**THE GREEN HELMET AND
OTHER POEMS**

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HIS DREAM

I swayed upon the gaudy stern
The butt end of a steering oar,
And everywhere that I could turn
Men ran upon the shore.

And though I would have hushed the
crowd

There was no mother's son but said,
"What is the figure in a shroud
Upon a gaudy bed?"

And fishes bubbling to the brim
Cried out upon that thing beneath,
It had such dignity of limb,
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I 'd my finger on my lip,
What could I but take up the song?
And fish and crowd and gaudy ship
Cried out the whole night long,

Crying amid the glittering sea,
Naming it with ecstatic breath,
Because it had such dignity
By the sweet name of Death.

A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

If any man drew near
When I was young,
I thought, "He holds her dear,"
And shook with hate and fear.
But oh, 't was bitter wrong
If he could pass her by
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought,
And now, being gray,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
"He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was."

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As 't were upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

THAT THE NIGHT COME

She lived in storm and strife.
Her soul had such desire
For what proud death may bring
That it could not endure
The common good of life,
But lived as 't were a king
That packed his marriage day
With banneret and pennon,
Trumpet and kettledrum,
And the outrageous cannon,
To bundle Time away
That the night come.

THE CONSOLATION

I had this thought awhile ago,
“My darling cannot understand
What I have done, or what would do
In this blind bitter land.”

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried, “At length
My darling understands it all,
Because I have come into my strength,
And words obey my call.”

That had she done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.

FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise—
Three women that have wrought
What joy is in my days;
One that no passing thought,
Nor those unpassing cares,
No, not in these fifteen
Many times troubled years,
Could ever come between
Heart and delighted heart;
And one because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
What none can have and thrive,
Youth's dreamy load, till she

So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

NO SECOND TROY

Why should I blame her that she filled
my days

With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,

Or hurled the little streets upon the
great,

Had they but courage equal to desire?

What could have made her peaceful with
a mind

That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done being
what she is?

Was there another Troy for her to burn?

RECONCILIATION

Some may have blamed you that you took
away

The verses that could move them on the
day

When, the ears being deafened, the sight
of the eyes blind

With lightning you went from me, and I
could find

Nothing to make a song about but kings,
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten
things

That were like memories of you—but
now

We 'll out, for the world lives as long ago ;

And while we 're in our laughing, weep-
ing fit,

Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into
the pit.

But, dear, cling close to me; since you
were gone,

My barren thoughts have chilled me to
the bone.

KING AND NO KING ✓

“Would it were anything but merely
voice!”

The No King cried who after that was
King,

Because he had not heard of anything
That balanced with a word is more
than noise;

Yet Old Romance being kind, let him
prevail

Somewhere or somehow that I have
forgot,

Though he 'd but cannon—Whereas
we that had thought

To have lit upon as clean and sweet a
tale

Have been defeated by that pledge you
gave

In momentary anger long ago ;
And I that have not your faith, how
shall I know

That in the blinding light beyond the
grave

We 'll find so good a thing as that we
have lost?

The hourly kindness, the day's com-
mon speech,

The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been
crossed.

THE COLD HEAVEN

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook de-
lighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and
was but the more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart
were driven
So wild, that every casual thought of
that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that
should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love
crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense
and reason,

Until I cried and trembled and rocked to
and fro,

Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost
begins to quicken,

Confusion of the death-bed over, is it
sent

Out naked on the roads, as the books say,
and stricken

By the injustice of the skies for punish-
ment?

PEACE

Ah, that Time could touch a form
That could show what Homer's age
Bred to be a hero's wage.

"Were not all her life but storm,
Would not painters paint a form
Of such noble lines" I said.

"Such a delicate high head,
So much sternness and such charm,
Till they had changed us to like
strength?"

Ah, but peace that comes at length,
Came when Time had touched her form.

AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

O heart, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What 's not for their applause,
Being for a woman's sake.
Enough if the work has seemed,
So did she your strength renew,
A dream that a lion had dreamed
Till the wilderness cried aloud,
A secret between you two,
Between the proud and the proud.

What, still you would have their praise!
But here 's a haughtier text,
The labyrinth of her days
That her own strangeness perplexed;

And how what her dreaming gave
Earned slander, ingratitude,
From self-same dolt and knave;
Aye, and worse wrong than these.
Yet she, singing upon her road,
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

THE FASCINATION OF WHAT 'S DIFFICULT

The fascination of what 's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and
rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart. There 's something
ails our colt
That must, as if it had not holy blood,
Nor on an Olympus leaped from cloud to
cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and
jolt
As though it dragged road metal. My
curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,

FASCINATION OF WHAT 'S DIFFICULT 21

On the day's war with every knave and
dolt,

Theatre business, management of men.

I swear before the dawn comes round
again

I 'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

A DRINKING SONG

Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That 's all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.

THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the
 sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.

ON HEARING THAT THE STUDENTS OF OUR NEW UNIVERSITY HAVE JOINED THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS AND THE AGITATION AGAINST IMMORAL LITERATURE

Where, where but here have Pride and
Truth,
That long to give themselves for wage,
To shake their wicked sides at youth
Restraining reckless middle-age.

**TO A POET, WHO WOULD HAVE ME
PRAISE CERTAIN BAD POETS,
IMITATORS OF HIS AND MINE**

You say, as I have often given tongue
In praise of what another 's said or sung,
'T were politic to do the like by these;
But where 's the wild dog that has
praised his fleas?

**THE ATTACK ON THE
"PLAY BOY"**

Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
Round about Hell's gate, to stare
At great Juan riding by,
And like these to rail and sweat,
Maddened by that sinewy thigh.

A LYRIC FROM AN UNPUBLISHED
PLAY

“Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.”

“O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.”

“I would but find what ’s there to find,
Love or deceit.”

“It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what ’s behind.”

“But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire.”

“O no, my dear, let all that be,
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?”

UPON A HOUSE SHAKEN BY THE LAND AGITATION

How should the world be luckier if this
house,

Where passion and precision have been
one

Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the
sun?

And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts
that grow

Where wings have memory of wings,
and all

That comes of the best knit to the best?
Although

Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its
fall,

HOUSE SHAKEN BY LAND AGITATION 29

How should their luck run high enough
to reach

The gifts that govern men, and after
these

To gradual Time's last gift, a written
speech

Wrought of high laughter, loveliness
and ease?

AT THE ABBEY THEATRE

Imitated from Ronsard

Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin, look into our
case.

When we are high and airy hundreds say
That if we hold that flight they 'll leave
the place,

While those same hundreds mock an-
other day

Because we have made our art of com-
mon things,

So bitterly, you 'd dream they longed
to look

All their lives through into some drift
of wings.

You 've dandled them and fed them from
the book

And know them to the bone; impart
to us—

We 'll keep the secret—a new trick to
please.

Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty
seas?

Or is there none, most popular of men,
But when they mock us that we mock
again?

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye;
The weak lay hand on what the strong
has done,

Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.

And therefore, friend, if your great race
were run

And these things came, so much the more
thereby

Have you made greatness your com-
panion,

Although it be for children that you
sigh:

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

AT GALWAY RACES

Out yonder, where the race course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
Riders upon the swift horses,
The field that closes in behind :
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work ;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on : sometime, and at some new
 moon,
We 'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the race course is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

A FRIEND'S ILLNESS

Sickness brought me this
Thought, in that scale of his :
Why should I be dismayed
Though flame had burned the whole
World, as it were a coal,
Now I have seen it weighed
Against a soul ?

ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME

All things can tempt me from this craft
of verse:

One time it was a woman's face, or
worse—

The seeming needs of my fool-driven
land;

Now nothing but comes readier to the
hand

Than this accustomed toil. When I was
young,

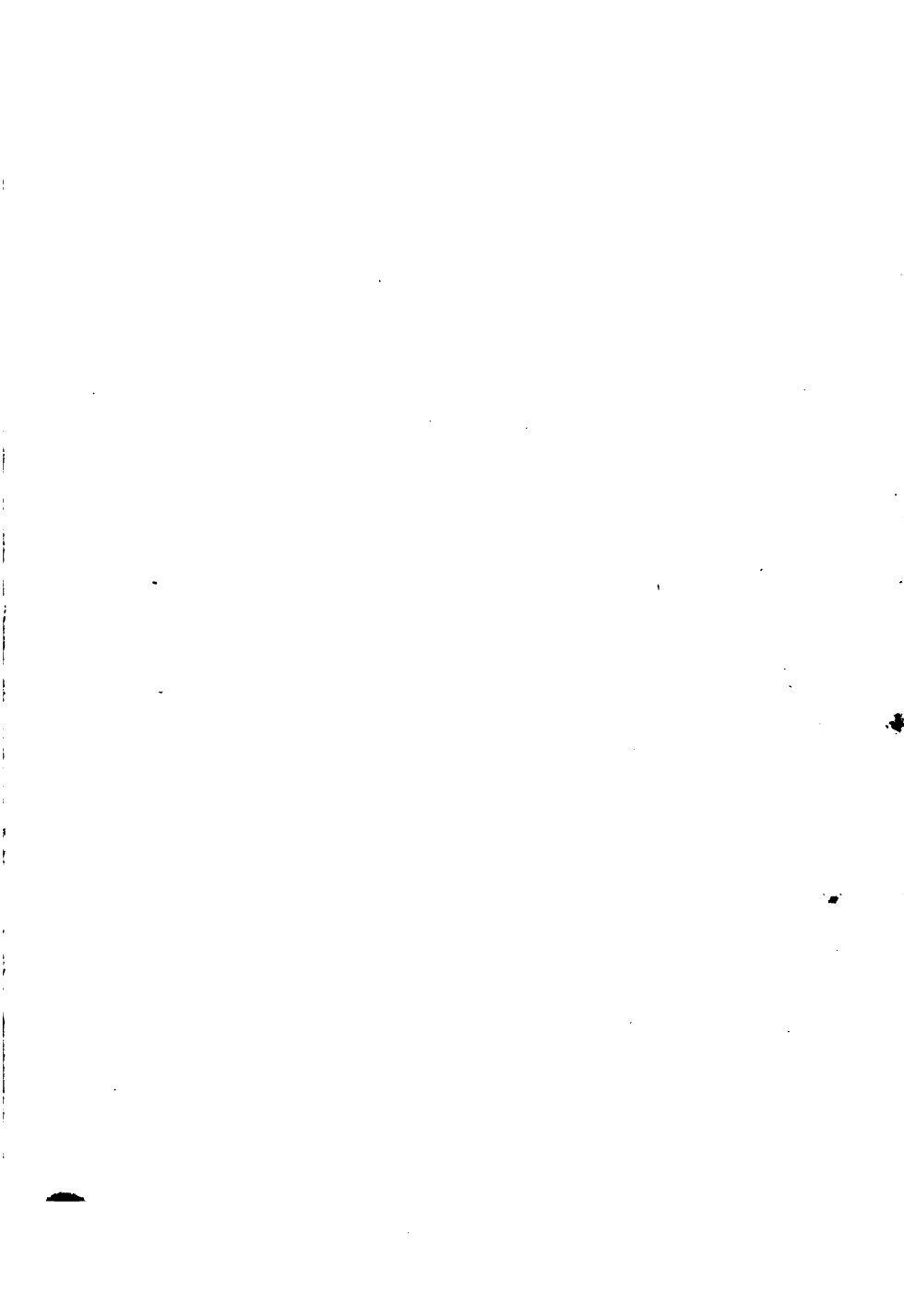
I had not given a penny for a song
Did not the poet sing it with such airs
That one believed he had a sword up-
stairs;

Yet would be now, could I but have my
wish,
Colder and dumber and deafer than a
fish.

THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

I whispered, "I am too young,"
And then, "I am old enough,"
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love;
"Go and love, go and love, young man,
If the lady be young and fair,"
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
I am looped in the loops of her hair.

Oh love is the crooked thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away,
And the shadows eaten the moon;
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.



THE GREEN HELMET

An Heroic Farce

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LAEGAIRE

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

CONALL

CONALL'S WIFE

CUCHULAIN

LAEG, *Cuchulain's*

EMER

chariot-driver

RED MAN, *A Spirit*

Horse Boys and Scullions,

Black Men, etc.

THE GREEN HELMET

An Heroic Farce

SCENE: *A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door one can see low rocks which make the ground outside higher than it is within, and beyond the rocks a misty moon-lit sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There is a great chair at the opposite side to the door, and in front of it a table with cups and a flagon of ale. Here and there are stools.*

At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters except

the RED MAN and the Black Men are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look nearly black. The Black Men all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The RED MAN is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.

LAEGATRE

What is that? I had thought that I saw,
though but in the wink of an eye,
A cat-headed man out of Connaught go
pacing and spitting by;
But that could not be.

CONALL

You have dreamed it—there's
nothing out there.

I killed them all before daybreak—I
hoked them out of their lair;
I cut off a hundred heads with a single
stroke of my sword,
And then I danced on their graves and
carried away their hoard.

LAEGAIRE

Does anything stir on the sea?

CONALL

Not even a fish or a gull:
I can see for a mile or two, now that the
moon's at the full.

[A distant shout.]

LAEGAIRE

Ah—there—there is someone who calls
us.

CONALL

But from the landward side,
And we have nothing to fear that has not
come up from the tide;
The rocks and the bushes cover whoever
made that noise,
But the land will do us no harm.

LAEGAIRE

It was like Cuchulain's voice.

CONALL

But that's an impossible thing.

LAEGAIRE

An impossible thing indeed.

CONALL

For he will never come home, he has all
that he could need

In that high windy Scotland—good luck
in all that he does.

Here neighbour wars on neighbour and
why there is no man knows,

And if a man is lucky all wish his luck
away,

And take his good name from him be-
tween a day and a day.

LAEGAIRE

I would he'd come for all that, and make
his young wife know

That though she may be his wife, she has
no right to go

Before your wife and my wife, as she
would have gone last night

Had they not caught at her dress, and
pulled her as was right;

And she makes light of us though our
wives do all that they can.

She spreads her tail like a peacock and
praises none but her man.

CONALL

A man in a long green cloak that covers
him up to the chin
Comes down through the rocks and
hazels.

LAEGAIRE

Cry out that he cannot come in.

CONALL

He must look for his dinner elsewhere,
for no one alive shall stop
Where a shame must alight on us two
before the dawn is up.

LAEGAIRE

No man on the ridge of the world must
ever know that but us two.

CONALL

[Outside door]

Go away, go away, go away.

YOUNG MAN

[Outside door]

I will go when the night is through
And I have eaten and slept and drunk to
my heart's delight.

CONALL

A law has been made that none shall
sleep in this house to-night.

YOUNG MAN

Who made that law?

CONALL

We made it, and who has so good a right?
Who else has to keep the house from the
Shape-Changers till day?

YOUNG MAN

Then I will unmake the law, so get you
out of the way.

*[He pushes past CONALL and goes
into house]*

CONALL

I thought that no living man could have
pushed me from the door,
Nor could any living man do it but for
the dip in the floor;
And had I been rightly ready there's no
man living could do it,
Dip or no dip.

LAEGAIRE

Go out—if you have your wits, go out,
 A stone's throw further on you will find
 a big house where
 Our wives will give you supper, and
 you'll sleep sounder there,
 For it's a luckier house.

YOUNG MAN

I'll eat and sleep where I will.

LAEGAIRE

Go out or I will make you.

YOUNG MAN

*[Forcing up LAEGAIRE's arm, passing
 him and putting his shield on the wall
 over the chair]*

Not till I have drunk my fill,

But may some dog defend me for a cat of
wonder's up.

Laegaire and Conall are here, the flagon
full to the top,
And the cups—

LAEGAIRE

It is Cuchulain.

CUCHULAIN

The cups are dry as a bone.

[He sits on chair and drinks]

CONALL

Go into Scotland again, or where you
will, but begone
From this unlucky country that was
made when the devil spat.

CUCHULAIN

If I lived here a hundred years, could a
worse thing come than that
Laegaire and Conall should know me and
bid me begone to my face?

CONALL

We bid you begone from a house that
has fallen on shame and disgrace.

CUCHULAIN

I am losing patience, Conall—I find you
stuffed with pride,
The flagon full to the brim, the front
door standing wide;
You'd put me off with words, but the
whole thing's plain enough,

You are waiting for some message to
bring you to war or love
In that old secret country beyond the
wool-white waves,
Or it may be down beneath them in
foam-bewildered caves
Where nine forsaken sea queens fling
shuttles to and fro;
But beyond them, or beneath them,
whether you will or no,
I am going too.

LAEGAIRE

Better tell it all out to the end;
He was born to luck in the cradle, his
good luck may amend
The bad luck we were born to.

CONALL

I'll lay the whole thing bare.
You saw the luck that he had when he
pushed in past me there.
Does anything stir on the sea?

LAEGAIRE

Not even a fish or a gull.

CONALL

You were gone but a little while. We
were there and the ale-cup full.
We were half drunk and merry, and mid-
night on the stroke
When a wide, high man came in with a
red foxy cloak,
With half-shut foxy eyes and a great
laughing mouth,

And he said when we bid him drink, that
he had so great a drouth
He could drink the sea.

CUCHULAIN

I thought he had come from one of you
Out of some Connaught rath, and would
lap up milk and mew;
But if he so loved water I have the tale
awry.

CONALL

You would not be so merry if he were
standing by,
For when we had sung or danced as he
were our next of kin
He promised to show us a game, the best
that ever had been;

And when we had asked what game, he
answered, "Why, whip off my head!
Then one of you two stoop down, and I'll
whip off his," he said.
"A head for a head," he said, "that is
the game that I play."

CUCHULAIN

How could he whip off a head when his
own had been whipped away?

CONALL

We told him it over and over, and that
ale had fuddled his wit,
But he stood and laughed at us there, as
though his sides would split,
Till I could stand it no longer, and
whipped off his head at a blow,

Being mad that he did not answer, and
more at his laughing so,
And there on the ground where it fell it
went on laughing at me.

LÆGAIRE

Till he took it up in his hands—

CONALL

And splashed himself into the sea.

CUCHULAIN

I have imagined as good when I've been
as deep in the cup.

LÆGAIRE

You never did.

CUCHULAIN

And believed it.

CONALL

Cuchulain, when will you stop
Boasting of your great deeds, and weigh-
ing yourself with us two,
And crying out to the world whatever we
say or do,
That you've said or done a better?—Nor
is it a drunkard's tale,
Though we said to ourselves at first that
it all came out of the ale,
And thinking that if we told it we should
be a laughing-stock,
Swore we should keep it secret.

LAEGAIRE

But twelve months upon the clock.

CONALL

A twelvemonth from the first time.

LAEGAIRE

And the jug full up to the brim:
For we had been put from our drinking
by the very thought of him.

CONALL

We stood as we're standing now.

LAEGAIRE

The horns were as empty.

CONALL

When
He ran up out of the sea with his head on
his shoulders again.

CUCHULAIN

Why, this is a tale worth telling.

CONALL

And he called for his debt and his right,
And said that the land was disgraced
because of us two from that night
If we did not pay him his debt.

LAEGAIRE

What is there to be said
When a man with a right to get it has
come to ask for your head?

CONALL

If you had been sitting there you had
been silent like us.

LAEGAIRE

He said that in twelve months more he
would come again to this house
And ask his debt again. Twelve months
are up to-day.

CONALL

He would have followed after if we had
run away.

LAEGAIRE

Will he tell every mother's son that we
have broken our word?

CUCHULAIN

Whether he does or does not we'll drive
him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if he but
dare to scoff.

CONALL

How can you fight with a head that
laughs when you've whipped it off?

LAEGAIRE

Or a man that can pick it up and carry it
out in his hand?

CONALL

He is coming now, there's a splash and a
rumble along the strand
As when he came last.

CUCHULAIN

Come, and put all your backs to the door.

*[A tall, red-headed, red-cloaked
man stands upon the threshold
against the misty green of the
sea; the ground, higher without
than within the house, makes him
seem taller even than he is. He
leans upon a great two-handed
sword]*

LAEGAIRE

It is too late to shut it, for there he
stands once more
And laughs like the sea.

CUCHULAIN

Old herring—You whip off heads! Why,
then

Whip off your own, for it seems you can
clap it on again.

Or else go down in the sea, go down in
the sea, I say,

Find that old juggler Manannan and
whip his head away;

Or the Red Man of the Boyne, for they
are of your own sort,

Or if the waves have vexed you and you
would find a sport

Of a more Irish fashion, go fight without
a rest

A caterwauling phantom among the
winds of the west.

But what are you waiting for? into the
water, I say!
If there's no sword can harm you, I've
an older trick to play,
An old five-fingered trick to tumble you
out of the place;
I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain—what, do
you laugh in my face?

RED MAN

So you too think me in earnest in wager-
ing poll for poll!
A drinking joke and a gibe and a jug-
gler's feat, that is all,
To make the time go quickly—for I am
the drinker's friend,

The kindest of all Shape-Changers from
here to the world's end,

The best of all tipsy companions. And
now I bring you a gift:

I will lay it there on the ground for the
best of you all to lift,

[He lays his Helmet on the ground]

And wear upon his own head, and choose
for yourselves the best.

O! Laegaire and Conall are brave, but
they were afraid of my jest.

Well, maybe I jest too grimly when the
ale is in the cup.

There, I'm forgiven now—

*[Then in a more solemn voice as he
goes out]*

Let the bravest take it up.

*[CONALL takes up Helmet and gazes
at it with delight]*

LAEGAIRE

[Singing, with a swaggering stride]

Laegaire is best;
Between water and hill,
He fought in the west
With cat heads, until
At the break of day
All fell by his sword,
And he carried away
Their hidden hoard.

[He seizes the Helmet]

CONALL

Give it me, for what did you find in the
bag
But the straw and the broken delf and
the bits of dirty rag
You'd taken for good money?

CUCHULAIN

No, no, but give it me.

[He takes Helmet]

CONALL

The Helmet's mine or Laegaire's—
you're the youngest of us three.

CUCHULAIN

[Filling Helmet with ale]

I did not take it to keep it—the Red Man
gave it for one,
But I shall give it to all—to all of us
three or to none;
That is as you look upon it—we will pass
it to and fro,
And time and time about, drink out of it
and so

Stroke into peace this cat that has come
to take our lives.

Now it is purring again, and now I drink
to your wives,

And I drink to Emer, my wife.

[A great noise without and shouting]

Why, what in God's name is that noise?

CONALL

What else but the charioteers and the
kitchen and stable boys

Shouting against each other, and the
worst of all is your own,

That chariot-driver, Laeg, and they'll
keep it up till the dawn,

And there's not a man in the house that
will close his eyes to-night,

Or be able to keep them from it, or know
what set them to fight.

[A noise of horns without]

There, do you hear them now? such
hatred has each for each
They have taken the hunting horns to
drown one other's speech
For fear the truth may prevail.—Here's
your good health and long life,
And, though she be quarrelsome, good
health to Emer, your wife.

*[The Charioteers, Stable Boys and
Kitchen Boys come running in.
They carry great horns, ladles
and the like]*

LAEG

I am Laeg, Cuchulain's driver, and my
master's cock of the yard.

ANOTHER

Conall would scatter his feathers.

[Confused murmurs]

LAEGAIRE

[To CUCHULAIN]

No use, they won't hear a word.

CONALL

They'll keep it up till the dawn.

ANOTHER

It is Laegaire that is the best,
For he fought with cats in Connaught
while Conall took his rest
And drained his ale pot.

ANOTHER

Laegaire—what does a man of his sort
Care for the like of us? He did it for his
own sport.

ANOTHER

It was all mere luck at the best.

ANOTHER

But Conall, I say—

ANOTHER

Let me speak.

LAEG

You'd be dumb if the cock of the yard
would but open his beak.

ANOTHER

Before your cock was born, my master
was in the fight.

LAEG

Go home and praise your grand-dad.
They took to the horns for spite,
For I said that no cock of your sort had
been born since the fight began.

ANOTHER

Conall has got it, the best man has got it,
and I am his man.

CUCHULAIN

Who was it started this quarrel?

A STABLE BOY

It was Laeg.

ANOTHER

It was Laeg done it all.

LAEG

A high, wide, foxy man came where we
sat in the hall,
Getting our supper ready, with a great
voice like the wind,
And cried that there was a helmet, or
something of the kind,

That was for the foremost man upon the
ridge of the earth.

So I cried your name through the hall,

*[The others cry out and blow horns,
partly drowning the rest of his
speech]*

but they denied its worth,
Preferring Laegaire or Conall, and they
cried to drown my voice;

But I have so strong a throat that I
drowned all their noise

Till they took to the hunting horns and
blew them into my face,

And as neither side would give in—we
would settle it in this place.

Let the Helmet be taken from Conall.

A STABLE BOY

No, Conall is the best man here.

ANOTHER

Give it to Laegaire that made the murderous cats pay dear.

CUCHULAIN

It has been given to none: that our rivalry might cease,
We have turned that murderous cat into a cup of peace.

I drank the first; and then Conall; give it to Laegaire now,

[CONALL *gives Helmet to LAEGAIRE*]

That it may purr in his hand and all of our servants know
That since the ale went in, its claws went out of sight.

A SERVANT

That's well—I will stop my shouting.

ANOTHER

Cuchulain is in the right;
I am tired of this big horn that has made
me hoarse as a rook.

LAEG

Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER

By drinking the first he took
The whole of the honours himself.

LAEG

Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER

If Laegaire drink from it now he claims
to be last and worst.

ANOTHER

Cuchulain and Conall have drunk.

ANOTHER

He is lost if he taste a drop.

LAEGAIRE

[Laying Helmet on table]

Did you claim to be better than us by
drinking first from the cup?

CUCHULAIN

*[His words are partly drowned by
the murmurs of the crowd though
he speaks very loud]*

That juggler from the sea, that old red
herring it is

Who has set us all by the ears—he
brought the Helmet for this,

And because we would not quarrel he
ran elsewhere to shout

That Conall and Laegaire wronged me,
till all had fallen out.

*[The murmur grows less so that
his words are heard]*

Who knows where he is now or who he is
spurring to fight?

So get you gone, and whatever may cry
aloud in the night,
Or show itself in the air, be silent until
morn.

A SERVANT

Cuchulain is in the right—I am tired of
this big horn.

CUCHULAIN

Go!

*[The Servants turn toward the
door but stop on hearing the
voices of Women outside]*

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

[*Without*]

Mine is the better to look at.

CONALL'S WIFE

[*Without*]

But mine is better born.

EMER

[*Without*]

My man is the pithier man.

CUCHULAIN

Old hurricane, well done!

You've set our wives to the game that

they may egg us on;

We are to kill each other that you may

sport with us.

Ah, now, they've begun to wrestle as to
who'll be first at the house.

*[The Women come to the door
struggling]*

EMER

No, I have the right of place for I married the better man.

CONALL'S WIFE

[Pulling EMER back]

My nails in your neck and shoulder.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

And go before me if you can.

My husband fought in the West.

CONALL'S WIFE

*[Kneeling in the door so as to keep
the others out who pull at her]*

But what did he fight with there

But sidelong and spitting and helpless
 shadows of the dim air?
And what did he carry away but straw
 and broken delf?

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

Your own man made up that tale trem-
 bling alone by himself,
Drowning his terror.

EMER

[Forcing herself in front]

I am Emer, it is I go first through the
 door.
No one shall walk before me, or praise
 any man before
My man has been praised.

CUCHULAIN

*[Spreading his arms across the door
so as to close it]*

Come, put an end to their quarrelling:
One is as fair as the other, and each one
the wife of a king.

Break down the painted boards between
the sill and the floor

That they come in together, each one at
her own door.

*[LAEGAIRE and CONALL begin to
break out the bottoms of the win-
dows, then their wives go to the
windows, each to the window
where her husband is. EMER
stands at the door and sings
while the boards are being broken
out]*

EMER

Nothing that he has done,
His mind that is fire,

His body that is sun,
Have set my head higher
Than all the world's wives.
Himself on the wind
Is the gift that he gives,
Therefore womenkind,
When their eyes have met mine,
Grow cold and grow hot,
Troubled as with wine
By a secret thought,
Preyed upon, fed upon
By jealousy and desire.
I am moon to that sun,
I am steel to that fire,

[*The windows are now broken down
to floor. CUCHULAIN takes his
spear from the door, and the
three Women come in at the
same moment*]

EMER

Cuchulain, put off this sloth and awake:
I will sing till I've stiffened your lip
 against every knave that would take
A share of your honour.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

You lie, for your man would take from
 my man.

CONALL'S WIFE

[*To LAEGAIRE'S WIFE*]

You say that, you double-face, and your
 own husband began.

CUCHULAIN

[*Taking up Helmet from table*]

Town land may rail at town land till all
 have gone to wrack,

The very straws may wrangle till they've
 thrown down the stack;
The very door-posts bicker till they've
 pulled in the door,
The very ale-jars jostle till the ale is on
 the floor,
But this shall help no further.

[He throws Helmet into the sea]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

It was not for your head,
And so you would let none wear it, but
 fling it away instead.

CONALL'S WIFE

But you shall answer for it, for you've
 robbed my man by this.

CONALL

You have robbed us both, Cuchulain.

LAEGAIRE

The greatest wrong there is
On the wide ridge of the world has been
done to us two this day.

EMER

[Drawing her dagger]

Who is for Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN

Silence!

EMER

Who is for Cuchulain, I say?

[She sings the same words as before, flourishing her dagger about. While she is singing, CONALL'S WIFE and LAEGAIRE'S

WIFE draw their daggers and run at her, but CUCHULAIN forces them back. LAEGAIRE and CONALL draw their swords to strike CUCHULAIN]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

[Crying out so as to be heard through EMER's singing]

Deafen her singing with horns!

CONALL'S WIFE

Cry aloud! blow horns! make a noise!

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

Blow horns, clap hands, or shout, so that
you smother her voice!

[The Horse Boys and Scullions blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly three black hands come

through the windows and put out the torches. It is now pitch dark, but for a faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices]

A VOICE

Coal-black, and headed like cats, they
came up over the strand.

ANOTHER VOICE

And I saw one stretch to a torch and
cover it with his hand.

ANOTHER VOICE

Another sooty fellow has plucked the
moon from the air.

[A light gradually comes into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more.

There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The RED MAN is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed Men crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword]

RED MAN

I demand the debt that's owing. Let
some man kneel down there
That I may cut his head off, or all shall
go to wrack.

CUCHULAIN

He played and paid with his head and
it's right that we pay him back,
And give him more than he gave, for he
comes in here as a guest:

So I will give him my head.

[EMER *begins to keen*]

Little wife, little wife, be at rest.

Alive I have been far off in all lands

under sun,

And been no faithful man; but when my
story is done

My fame shall spring up and laugh, and
set you high above all.

EMER

[*Putting her arms about him*]

It is you, not your fame, that I love.

CUCHULAIN

[*Tries to put her from him*]

You are young, you are wise, you can call
Some kinder and comelier man that will
sit at home in the house.

EMER

Live and be faithless still.

CUCHULAIN

[Throwing her from him]

Would you stay the great barnacle-goose
When its eyes are turned to the sea and
its beak to the salt of the air?

EMER

[Lifting her dagger to stab herself]

I, too, on the grey wing's path.

CUCHULAIN

[Seizing dagger]

Do you dare, do you dare, do you dare?
Bear children and sweep the house.

*[Forcing his way through the Ser-
vants who gather round]*

Wail, but keep from the road.

*[He kneels before RED MAN. There
is a pause]*

Quick to your work, old Radish, you will
fade when the cocks have crowed.

*[A black cat-headed Man holds out
the Helmet. The RED MAN takes
it]*

RED MAN

I have not come for your hurt, I'm the
Rector of this land,

And with my spitting cat-heads, my
frenzied moon-bred band,

Age after age I sift it, and choose for its
championship

The man who hits my fancy.

*[He places the Helmet on CUCHU-
LAIN's head]*

AND OTHER POEMS

91

And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing what-
ever rise or fall,
The heart that grows no bitterer al-
though betrayed by all;
The hand that loves to scatter; the life
like a gambler's throw;
And these things I make prosper, till a
day come that I know,
When heart and mind shall darken that
the weak may end the strong,
And the long remembering harpers have
matter for their song.

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